

# Nevada Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **Nevada Department of Agriculture Prepares For West Nile Virus**

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a member of a group of viruses known as arboviruses. It affects humans, horses, and most species of birds. WNV was first detected in North America in 1999 in New York. Since then, WNV has steadily moved westward and the latest count includes California, Arizona and Utah. In Nevada, the Animal Disease Laboratory has been conducting surveillance testing for WNV on a variety of species since March of 2001 and all testing so far has been negative.

As with other arboviruses, WNV is spread through a bird-mosquito cycle and transmitted to mammals, including humans, through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes are infected by taking a blood meal from infected birds, such as the members of the raven family. In North America, humans, horses, and many species of birds are susceptible to infection with WNV. Only the corvid (raven) species (crows, ravens, magpies, jays, and their relatives) are truly susceptible to WNV disease and serve as useful sentinels of WNV activity.

According to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, there have been no documented cases of person-to-person (except for blood transfusion, organ donation and trans-placental), animal-to-person, or animal-to-animal transmission of WNV. The horse is a dead-end host, meaning that the virus doesn't multiply to high enough levels within the horse to provide an infectious source for the mosquitoes.

Currently, there is no vaccine available for humans but there are two licensed vaccines for horses. Because adequate protection requires nearly two months, the Nevada Department of Agriculture is encouraging Nevada horse owners to have their horses vaccinated for WNV in time for the mosquito season. The vaccination schedule consists of two intramuscular doses administered 3-6 weeks apart, and then annual revaccination. The two vaccines are significantly different from each other and booster shots are only efficacious if the same vaccine is used for both primary vaccination and booster. Please contact your veterinarian for more information.

The Nevada Department of Agriculture has implemented a surveillance program to monitor the arrival and spread of WNV in the state to assist state and local agencies in reducing the impact of this disease on humans and horses. Surveillance includes monitoring for WNV in wild horses, sentinel chicken flocks, migratory wildlife, dead corvids, and mosquitoes throughout the state. If you notice multiple birds dying please contact the Nevada Department of Agriculture closest to you so proper submission samples and pertinent information can be obtained. There are offices in Reno, Las Vegas, Carson City, Winnemucca and Elko.